

Navigation fund set up

Move to keep Malacca Straits safe

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PENANG: The newly launched Aids to Navigation Fund will help the Marine Department reduce its annual RM20mil expenditure to upkeep lighthouses and light buoys along the Straits of Malacca.

Department director-general Datuk Kapt Ahmad Othman said this was because part of the fund, which was launched by Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia here yesterday, would be used to improve and upkeep lighthouses and to replace light buoys.

He said light buoys that needed to be replaced would be determined by a "critical aids to navigation" survey in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore scheduled to begin next month and to be paid for by the fund.

"We received a head start when the Japanese-based Nippon Foundation contributed US\$1.4mil (RM4.4mil) to the fund. The Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates and the Middle East Navigations Aids Service have also pledged a total of US\$1.2mil (RM3.84mil).

"China and Japan are seriously considering contributing to the fund. This is in addition to the two countries' contributions towards various projects under the cooperative mechanism to help maintain the safety of navigation

and marine environment protection along the straits," he said after the launch.

Kapt Ahmad said the fund committee held its inaugural two-day meeting, which ended yesterday and was attended by China, Greece and Japan as well as representatives from the International Maritime Organisation.

"The committee formalised the rules of governance of administration of the fund based on international standards of transparency and accountability.

"The fund administration will be rotated among the three countries with Malaysia being appointed as the pioneer administrator for the next three years," he said.

The three countries accepted a Letter of Undertaking from Nippon Foundation executive director Masazumi Nagamitsu for the foundation's contribution during the launch.

Nagamitsu said the foundation decided to make a contribution to the fund as the rise in demand for international marine transportation had significantly increased the risks along the straits.

"We hope that our contribution will encourage international maritime shipping communities to contribute to the fund as the number of vessels plying the straits is projected to increase by 50% to 140,000 in 2020," he said.